

Letter from Archibald J. Treat, San Francisco attorney  
living in Sausalito, to his sister Eleanor Treat, then  
visiting relatives in Elko, Nevada.

Written nine days after the 1906 Earthquake.

Property of Van Allen and Laura Treat

Sausalito, California

To Frank and Marion Kelly  
Fr. Van and Laura 1962

Sausalito, April 27 - 1906

Dear Sis:

I hardly know where to begin in this effort to picture the happenings of the last week. We were awakened on the morning of the 18th about 5.15 by the first shock of earthquake. It was immediately succeeded by the second, and I can best liken my sensations to those of a rat being shaken by a bull terrier, for that second shock was no imitation. The walls of the room seemed to shrink, and all objects came towards me in a mad, jiggling dance. To add to the confusion everything in the house seemed to be churning around in a huge coffee machine, and slowly getting closer to the wheels. This was due to falling chimneys, breaking glass, and the working of the timbers of the house. I held Gus by one arm and steadied myself in bed with the other, she in the meantime shrieking for me to let her go. I thought the bed as safe a place as any, and forced her to remain until the shock had passed. She lost no time then reaching the street, and I carried Van down in his bedclothes. Laura had made good use of her long legs and was not far behind. I brought all the clothes to the front porch, and the family then made itself more presentable. Norah, the girl, was slow in coming from her room, and afterwards explained this by saying that she had not been to church much of late and stopped to say her prayers.

After an early breakfast I proceeded to town, as I was anxious to see if my office with its records was safe, and to see how Mama was. As we approached the City we discovered that the down town business district was in flames. The car lines were stopped, and I made my way up Sacramento Street. The old, low brick structures of the early day period were badly broken and wrecked. Here and there in the larger buildings a section of wall was gone. The more substantial structures,

however, like the Mills, Haywards, & Call Buildings were intact. Making my way up town over the masses of brick which littered the streets, I climbed the five flights of stairs to my office and found it comparatively unharmed, though everything was covered thick with dust from the fallen plaster. I hurriedly put into my safe all the more valuable records, at least as many of them as were at hand. While so engaged quite a sharp shock occurred and I thought it about time to go down and see about the progress of the fire. Looking back as I hastily put on my coat I saw that I had left the safe door open. It did not take me long to close it and reach the sidewalk. My main object in going to town was to find out how Mama had survived the shock, so I walked at once out California Street to her house. The neighbors told me she had gone to the Reys, and I there found her. She was not as nervous as I expected, and had braced up like a Trojan. DeWitt was with her. It was then about 9 o'clock. I returned to California and Montgomery Streets, and tried to find some trunk store open, that I might get something in which to carry the more important records away from my office. Everything was closed, though I found one coffee house open and there laid in a piece of bread and butter and a cup of coffee. The fire was now up to Sansome Street and California on the East and was threatening the Palace Hotel on the South. I went to the Hall of Justice and offered my services as a special officer. Fortunately for me, perhaps, they were not needed. On reaching the street I noted that to the East the fire had stopped for the time, at Sansome Street, but on looking to the South saw that the Call Building was on fire. This was a most spectacular sight. This beautiful structure had stood like a bulwark preventing the flames eating into Market Street from Third and Mission; but now it was blazing like a huge fanciful torch, the flames shooting from its upper windows. I walked to the Palace Hotel and found that the flames had not yet touched it, (though both the Crossley and

Rialto buildings were going.) Having its own water plant, the employees were making a heroic stand to save this historic building. Their efforts succeeded for a time, but later in the day this huge structure went, together with its neighbors, the Union Trust Building, the Chronicle and the Mutual Life Insurance Company building. It is hard to realize the completeness of the destruction. From the Ferry to a block or more beyond the City Hall, from Meiggs Wharf to the foot of Second Street, and from there to the Potrero is a waste. By the most stupendous effort the fire was stopped at Van Ness Avenue, and the residences of the Western Addition thus saved. St. Ignatius Church and part of Hayes Valley, however, were destroyed. The view from the top of California Street hill, looking down upon the remains of the tall buildings is a sight which makes the pictures of Pompeii look small indeed. At night we could watch the conflagration from Sausalito, and sitting on the hillside in the peace and quiet of the night, hazard whether the Western Addition could be saved.

My office went in the evening of the 18th, the fire having worked around behind it. The next day I went to the Hyde St. house and told Mama and DeWitt to pack as if for a few day's stay in the country. We put all we could into two suitcases and handbags. As I looked about the rooms I couldn't bear to see the pictures left behind. I cut from their frames that little marsh scene of yours, the Keith, the Tom Hill and the little sketch of Matilda Lotz. The thought that all my negatives were at the Sunset Press, which had burned, aroused my conceit and I brought away about a half dozen prints of them. By easy stages we walked to the Ferry and after a wait of about an hour reached Sausalito.

Learning that supplies might run short, I chartered a launch for the next day and went to Oakland to buy a lot of provisions, three of us neighbors chipping in. I was also desirous of communicating with the Bank at Livermore. We had heard nothing from the outside world whatever. A rumor reached us

that Los Angeles was in ruins, and that Chicago had slipped off the map. It was from Oakland that I sent you the first postal.

A ship load of provisions came in the next day, and after that seven cars of stuff. There has, as was to be expected, been much doubling up, some of our thrifty Portuguese having laid in enough edibles to last them for many rainy days to come. Our stores here have not once ceased to supply their customers with whatever was needed, confining them, however, to short orders.

Mama does not want to go to Elko, at least at this time. I make it a plan never to urge such matters, because if things were to go wrong because of any mishap, I might always regret advising. She is very comfortable here and contented. The trains are overcrowded and delayed, and accidents possible. I think it best to wait awhile. At present no fires are permitted in the houses of San Francisco, the meals being cooked upon stoves or makeshift ranges in the street. Almost the entire City, regardless of former condition, is obtaining provisions from the relief stations. The Levys, for instance, have to obtain theirs from the Cathedral on Van Ness Avenue. Edith came over here the other day and offered me the use of the basement of the house as a law office. While I much appreciate the generosity of these good friends I do not think I shall accept. The present center is on Fillmore and Bush Streets, and for some time there will be no cars on Eddy Street.

Day before yesterday I visited the Broadway house. Both chimneys were down, and the plaster cracked on the lower floor. Beyond that no damage was done.

It was very thoughtful and generous of you to send me the money. It was difficult to obtain coin at first, as the banks would not cash checks. But in point of fact there was not much need for money, at least not in Sausalito, for the store-keepers honored our orders and did not raise prices. Had this disaster come upon me a couple of years ago it would have crippled

me sorely; but Varney matters have been gradually disentangling and I can stand it better than many others. So if you dont mind I will prefer to send you my check for the \$10.00 you sent me. A long time ago you gave me out of your hard earned store \$5.00 in the form of currency. I have always carried it and still have it, so you see I haven't been broke yet, as it is still in my pocketbook. I shall also send Wellie my check, keeping the money sent as a reserve. I dont need much ready money at this time.

All the banks are making contracts for the restoration of their buildings. Not a bank in the City escaped destruction. As soon as they resume, a certain amount of business will be brought back to the downtown district. Attorneys are hiring rooms over saloons and sections of flats in the Western Addition. At present my office is under my hat, and I have the consolation that my rent is cheap. I put some stuff in my safe, as stated, corporation books and the like. It is probably weighed down by a few tons of brick and so cannot run away.

Our banks in Livermore are in good condition, and as we have followed, if anything, an ultra-conservative course, they are in condition to stand a run if necessary. I receive a regular retainer from the Varney Estate Co. and I dont intend to let it go if it be possible to prevent it. It still has property worth \$200,000 to look after and distribute, and I do all the legal work of the banks. You see, therefor, that I am much better off than those attorneys whose business interests were entirely within San Francisco.

This letter is long enough. Love to you and all good friends in Elko.

Arch.

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